

Members of the County Council,

Thank you for taking the time to review my testimony. I know that budgets are complex documents with many competing demands, and there is no making everyone happy, so I don't envy your task, but it is appreciated all the same.

As is usually the case my main focus is on housing, in this case primarily affordable housing funding and I was pleased to see the county executive's substantial investment in affordable housing. There can and should always be more, but progress is progress, and more revenue can and should be part of the discussion of doing more (more on that later). However, I was disappointed to see that he did not propose funding parks in a way that would keep up with inflated expenses, and encourage the council to correct this imbalance as much as is feasible. Funding parks, which seems to have been singled out for a more modest increase than other departments that will not keep pace with expenses, funding the housing production fund and other affordable housing measures as much as possible, and making sure we continue to invest in our schools are all key, though I'll note boundary adjustments could also help quite a bit on enrollment levels when it comes to the latter. With regard to parks, we have one of the best systems in the state, and it is curious and frustrating that the county executive keeps trying to shortchange that system year after year. I thank the council for repeatedly counteracting these measures of the last few years, and unfortunately must ask you to do so again.

I also encourage the county to find funds to help assist our most vulnerable in less traditional ways too. Money, even a somewhat modest amount, to retrofit housing to accommodate handicapped individuals, for example, could go a long way, and I urge the council to consider this option.

As for revenue, I am aware of the controversy caused by the county executive's proposed property tax increase. As with all tax increases, they are not cost free, and I won't pretend to have done the math to say that the proposed increases are the exact right amount. I encourage compromise if that is the best path forward. Our taxes have been raised recently, yes, but they are hardly out of line, having recently moved from a lower than average tax burden from the area to a relatively average one. We should not raise taxes lightly, but with schools, parks, housing, and other programs competing for scarce dollars at a time when federal funds are drying up, and need is increasing, our appetite for them should not be zero either.

For what it's worth I'd also suggest factoring in income tax increases as a possible part of the solution were they not capped by state law, and I encourage the council to work with state lawmakers on that path going forward. I would also, as a housing advocate, be remiss if I did not point out that the county executive's anti growth policies have long stymied our tax base, and expanding the tax base by welcoming in more housing and more businesses could go a long way here as well. If Montgomery County wants to keep being the protective progressive bastion it sees itself as, it's going to need to allow some change. I'm sure many of the people opposing a property tax increase also opposed more than one commercial or residential development in their time too. .

Now it is true that should significant tax increases continue indefinitely our economic competitiveness could be harmed, and it's true that perceptions matter, but part of the reason those perceptions exist is because we let false narratives about our tax burden propagate. By and large, we have room to increase rates without crippling taxpayers and it does no one any good to pretend otherwise

However, the whole discussion is frustrating when the county executive and others constantly deride new development that would add taxpayers and tax revenue to county coffers, and critics who point out that our economic development is stagnating are not wrong. Tax rate increases going forward can and should be part of the discussion, but so should growing our tax base over the protests of those that would prefer to preserve things in amber. Doubly so when new housing makes things more affordable for people to live here, and commercial investments can lead to more jobs.

Thank you,

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